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Editorial

THE MONTHS OF July and August are for millions of people living in the northern hemisphere, **holiday** months. Encouraged by the warmer weather, families take themselves off to the sunnier parts of the country or to resorts abroad, to take their summer holidays. In the European and North American countries, school is suspended for as many as six or seven weeks, with teacher and pupil alike enjoying a well-earned break and the beaches are full of happy holiday makers.

However, this is not a happy scene repeated the world over. In many countries the concept of a holiday is quite unknown. Where repressive regimes rule, life is one of continuous work, being a struggle for survival rather than enjoyment.

Pictures coming to us from drought stricken African countries present an altogether different scene. Instead of children with buckets and spades building castles in the sand and laughing as the sea washes them away, there is a desperate digging for water and it is the tears of both children and their parents which prevail.

Change is on the way! The word 'holiday' is derived in the English language from the words and ideas associated with a day being a **holy day**. God told his people that one day in their lives was to be such a day - holy, and separated to serve HIM.

It is recorded as follows:

'Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.'¹

¹Exodus 20. 8-11.

EDITORIAL

So God established one day in the week for his people to set aside as a special day of rest and in honour of all that God had done and was doing for them.

In this issue of **LIGHT** on a New World we consider the sabbath and in particular, how we are required to honour God in **our** way of life.

God has promised to extend to all the world a time of peace and security - in effect and by description, **a sabbath of rest**. Writing to christian believers in the first century, the Apostle Paul explained that God's purpose to establish His Kingdom on the earth will introduce a sabbath of rest:

'There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest...' ²

How the world needs this wonderful time! How important that we listen to Paul's advice to make every effort to please God and so to enter into that rest, that **holy day** that God has reserved for the righteous.

So, if **you** are privileged to enjoy a holiday this years, spare a thought for those who struggle just to survive and above all, remember that no holiday in this life can compare with the benefits of God's Kingdom, soon to be established on this earth.

Editor

²Hebrews 4. 9-11 (NIV)

Which Path — Does it Matter?

MY NEIGHBOUR ANSWERED, *'Well, I suppose all roads lead to God in the end, don't they?'*

It is, of course, a popular idea that so long as our intentions are generally good God will look after us and He will sort it all out for us when our days come to an end.

I suppose Uzza was like that.

Uzza lived during the time of King David, Israel's greatest king. King David came to the throne at a time when Israel had been defeated by the Philistines resulting in the death of the former king, Saul, and the capture of Israel's most holy symbol, the Ark of the Covenant (a wooden box containing stone tablets stating God's law).

One of David's first tasks after becoming king was to retrieve the Ark and bring it to Jerusalem:

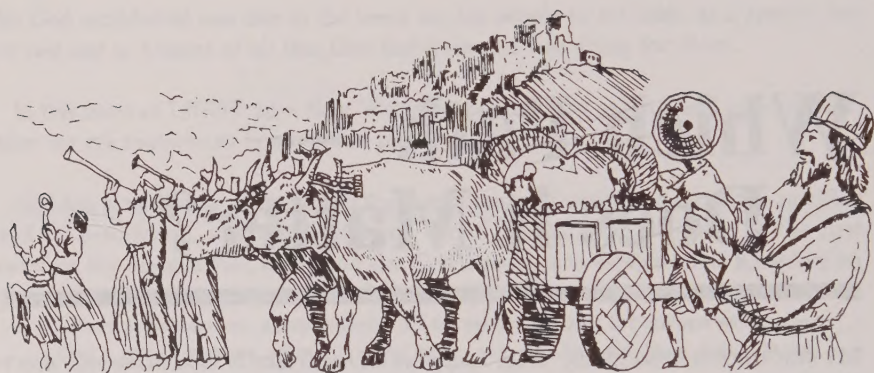
*'And David went up, and all Israel to Baalah . . . to bring up thence the ark of God the Lord . . . And they carried the ark of God in a new cart out of the house of Abinadab: and Uzza and Ahio drave the cart. And David and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets.'*¹

We can picture the scene. Here was David, along with Uzza and the others, bringing to Jerusalem this holy Ark, which contained God's Law, to put it back where it belonged, with everybody singing and praising God for all their worth.

But there was a problem.

Part of God's Law commanded that the Ark should only be handled by the Kohathites, part of the tribe of Levi.² The Ark had been provided with staves for carrying and no allowance was ever given for the Ark to be carried on a cart.

¹*1 Chronicles 13 v. 6-8* ²*Numbers 3 v. 30,31*



So then, here was the test case. Here we have people who were following God with great energy. Their hearts, it would seem, were in the right place. My neighbour would have approved.

‘And when they came unto the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark; for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzza, and he smote him, because he put his hand to the ark: and there he died before God.’³

Uzza, and David for that matter, had ignored the rules. God had commanded who could, and who could not, touch or handle the Ark and given instructions for its transport. In the same way we must be careful how WE handle God’s Law. We ignore it at our peril.

THE APOSTLE

‘For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.’⁴

The account of Uzza’s misfortune was recorded as a lesson for us. A lesson which is picked up on and emphasised in the New Testament:

‘There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism.’⁵

The apostle Paul, who wrote those words, knew that there is just **ONE** code of belief and practice contained in God’s word and that there is just one hope for the future for followers of those beliefs and practices. Anything which disagrees with this is described as **NON-BELIEF**.

³1 Chronicles 13 v. 9,10 ⁴Romans 15 v. 4 ⁵Ephesians 4 v. 4,5

Paul again restates the point.

'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers . . . Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord . . . and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.'⁶

We are beginning to see just how important it is to know what God really wants of us. Paul here tells us that this is essential if we are to be God's children.

The Bible even goes on to warn against those trying to pollute God's message:

'A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject.'⁷

'But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.'⁸

Again and again the same message is repeated:

'Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the SAME THING, and that there be no divisions among you: but that ye be perfectly joined together in the SAME MIND and in the same judgment.'⁹

But this brings a problem. There are dozens of different religions, all of them claiming the Bible as their basis, all of them claiming God as their creator. Yet all of them preach widely differing beliefs. The problem is this: How are we to find which of these many religions, if any, teach that true gospel referred to by the apostle Paul?

We have established, I think, that only **ONE** path, truly, leads to God.

But which one?

THE SOWER

Many people try to preach to us their view of the Scriptures.

'And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and **SEARCHED THE SCRIPTURES** daily, whether those things were so.'¹⁰

There is no reason why we should not listen to people, but we must refer back to the Bible and check whether what we are being told is right or not.

Only in the Bible is to be found the wisdom to save us:

' . . . From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.'¹¹

' . . . that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies . . . '¹²

⁶2 Corinthians 6 v. 14,17,18 ⁷Titus 3 v. 10 ⁸Galatians 1 v. 8,9 ⁹1 Corinthians 1 v. 10

¹⁰Acts 17 v. 10,11 ¹¹2 Timothy 3 v. 15-17 ¹²1 Timothy 1 v. 3,4

So important are the Scriptures that they are referred to as the '*Word of Life*'¹³ and we are commanded to '*hold it forth*.'¹³

If we really want to please God, to find out what He wants from us, the only way we can do this is by studying the Bible and following ITS teachings.

Jesus spoke, in one of his many parables, about a sower which sowed seed which fell on different types of soil: the wayside, stony, thorn ridden and fertile respectively. We read that, '*The sower soweth the word*.'¹⁴ The parable itself refers to the preaching of the '*Word of life*': the gospel message as recorded in the Bible. No farmer would sow several different crops out of the same basket. No farmer would try to sow corn, millet, maize and barley in the same field. In the same way there is, as we have seen, only one WORD. The seed that is sown, the Word of Life must be constant and it must agree with the clear message of the Bible. If not, then it is not a good crop bearing seed, but is more likely to be weeds blown in by the wind.

Only the Bible contains the Word of Life. Through its pages we can find our way down life's highway in a manner which pleases God:

'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.'¹⁵

THE HISTORY OF MAN

But just a second. WHY are there all these religions?

'For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.'¹⁶

The Bible itself predicted that many would ignore its teachings. Even in the later years of the apostles Paul and John this was beginning to happen with Jewish converts attempting to re-introduce parts of the old Law, such as Sabbath-keeping. In A.D. 107 we have the martyrdom (in rather strange circumstances) of Ignatius whose letters include such lines as, '*... since ye are subject to THE BISHOP as to Jesus Christ ...*', and, '*... it is not lawful, without THE BISHOP, to baptise ...*', and '*... it behoves the married to enter into that connection with the consent of THE BISHOP ...*' This all clearly contravenes scriptural teaching which refers to a plurality of elders; '*... obey THEM that have the rule over you*.'¹⁷ The word Bishop meaning 'overseer' and nothing more.

Things got worse.

Irenaeus, Tertullian, Pantaenus, Clemens Alexandrinus and others became involved with debates surrounding a dangerous brew of pagan philosophy between about A.D. 160-210.

¹³Philippians 2 v. 16 ¹⁴Mark 4 v. 14 ¹⁵Psalms 119 v. 105 ¹⁶² Timothy 4 v. 3,4

¹⁷Hebrews 13 v. 17

In A.D.240 Origen and Eusebius openly propagated pagan teaching of the immortality of the soul as 'official' church doctrine. At the African Council in A.D.253 the immortality of the soul and infant sprinkling were finally accepted. From that time to this mass 'Christianity' has been a varying mix of Bible based pagan philosophy and, with such unsure foundations, many different colours of the mix, many different 'Christian' religions have inevitably emerged, as the Bible predicted.

THE NEIGHBOUR AGAIN

'... I am the LORD, I change not ...'¹⁸

God never changes. Neither does His Word. Man has corrupted God's Word which has resulted in the many different 'Christian' religions which exist today. But God's Word is still there. God's true, uncorrupted message can therefore still be found. Don't expect it to be easy.

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure HID in a field; the which when the man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.'¹⁹

The treasure IS there. Don't take the easy way out, like my neighbour. Our appeal to you, as students of the Bible, is to get out your shovels and start looking.

J Rowland
Kingswinford



¹⁸Malachi 3 v. 6 ¹⁹Matthew 13 v. 44

The Cover Picture

THE PICTURE THAT forms the cover of this issue of *LIGHT on a New World*, is designed to direct our thoughts toward a journey that many of us occasionally take, leaving the hustle and bustle of the towns and cities behind.

How peaceful it is to be able to walk down narrow lanes and paths, when we are alone or perhaps with a companion, enjoying the freedom that may only last for just a short time. Sometimes, not even knowing where they may lead us, until we reach that signpost, which offers us a choice of this way or that.

In one direction, the road will look easy. We see a gate, wide, with no apparent obstructions or difficult passage. Whilst the other is narrow, a tiny entrance, a small gate, looking far more restrictive and even giving an impression of going no-where at all.

The first road is sought by many, who seeing the generous and apparent direct route, clamour to proceed along it, not realizing that it is going no-where at all, but will end with disappointment and frustration.

Whereas the narrow road, once followed, is more easily trod. The obstructions seem more easily overcome and despite all the difficulties, the route leads directly to the place we are trying to find.

So Jesus used this everyday country scene as he spoke to the multitudes during his 'sermon on the mount' as it is known. Matthew records His words as he tells of the occasion:—

'Enter ye in at the straight gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat: Because straight is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.'¹

The journey to the Kingdom of God is along the narrow path and as we have read, Jesus warns that few will actually find it. Why is this?

Mainly because most people want to take the easy way out. What looks good often feels good. Why do something which is difficult?, 'life is too short', some say.

However, Jesus taught that this is the route we all should take. He certainly did and his Father gave him the greatest gift of all

. . . . The gift of Eternal Life.

¹Matthew 7.13,14

The Sabbath — made for man

APPROACHING THE TOWN nearest to my home from the South, in the evening, we have always been greeted by an unearthly glow in the sky — every night except Sundays. On Sundays the glow has been subdued — until last Christmas, that is. Suddenly the unearthly glow was there on Sundays too. The explanation is simple: the town is ringed by superstores which, during opening hours ‘Eight till late’, are brilliantly lit to beckon the shoppers, and no doubt for security reasons. Last Christmas, the laws on Sunday opening hours were widely breached, hence the seventh day of super-lights on the superstores. Nationally, and in our provincial newspaper, the arguments and correspondence raged. Some welcomed the end of hypocrisy, others sought to protect *the Lord’s day*. The row has died down now, and the stores remain open on Sundays. So what was all the fuss about?

IN THE BEGINNING

It all began some 6,000 years ago. The book of Genesis describes, in chapter 1, the creation of the world and the chapter ends *‘Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.’*

The record continues in chapter 2:

‘Thus the heavens and the earth and all the host of them were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work . . . then God rested on the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all his work . . .’¹

This was the first Sabbath. Elsewhere in the Bible we are told that the creation was ultimately for God’s pleasure. So, on the Sabbath, God did what we do when we have worked hard at something — He enjoyed his creation. He also rested from his work.

KEEP IT HOLY . . .

The book of Exodus records the establishment of God’s people Israel, and the laws they were given.

All references from the New King James Version ¹Genesis 1.31, 2.3

One of those laws was the law of the Sabbath — they should work for six days and rest on the Sabbath: 'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work . . . for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth . . .'² Then followed other laws about not killing, not committing adultery, not stealing, not bearing false witness, not coveting.

But what was the purpose of the law of the Sabbath — to ensure that the people had a proper rest? Partly, but it was primarily to remind them about their God and Creator. They were meant to see that they were God's creation, created for God's pleasure, and the Sabbath was a day to share with God. It was a day to be '*holy*' — this means separate, special, set apart for God.

THEY POLLUTED MY SABBATHS . . .

Sadly, God's people gave Him little pleasure. They preferred to disobey Him. There are examples in the Bible of men and women who worked on the Sabbath and did what THEY wanted to do — and suffered for it. They also flouted those other laws, and killed, stole . . . but more dangerous than this — they ritualised God's law. In the course of time simple obedience to the Law of the Sabbath was turned into a morass of prohibitions and petty rules, added to the simple law '*keep it holy*'. God could be forgotten, reduced to rules and ritual, leaving them free to pursue their own wishes: '*They despised my judgments, which, if a man does, he shall live by them, and they greatly defiled my Sabbaths.*'³

MADE FOR MAN

This hypocrisy had been developed into a fine art by the time of Jesus. He was constantly criticised by the Jewish leaders for breaking the Sabbath laws — healing sick people, raising the dead — doing good on the Sabbath day and allowing his disciples to do the same.

It was on such an occasion that Jesus was prompted to say: 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.'⁴

Jesus was walking on the Sabbath day with his disciples and they picked ears of corn and ate the grain. This, said the Pharisees, was a breach of the Sabbath law. In reply, Jesus recalled two occasions from Old Testament history — when King David was hungry and ate the holy temple bread and was not punished, and how the priests who serve God in the temple on the Sabbath are in fact working, yet are blameless. Then: '*the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath . . .*'⁴ What did Jesus mean? He meant that the Old Testament laws were not intended merely to prohibit, but to ENABLE — to enable men and women to understand God and their part in His creation, that just as God rested from his creative work on

²Exodus 20.9-11 ³Ezekiel 20.13 ⁴Mark 2.27

the seventh day in order to enjoy His creation, so the Sabbath was made for man. He should use it to understand God, and celebrate his relationship with Him. Prohibiting the plucking of corn ears, and other petty rules had nothing to do with the real meaning of the Sabbath. Kindness, compassion, healing and love DID.

A SABBATH OF REST

How does this affect true Christians today?

By Christ's time, the law had virtually run its course. Everything in it (including the Sabbath) pointed to Christ — his birth, his life, his example, particularly his sacrificial death, and his resurrection. Animals were killed under the law to cover men's disobedience to God — year after year. Jesus died once for all time to cover the sins of mankind.

The Apostle Paul, a pre-eminent follower of Jesus, wrote about Jesus: *'Having wiped out the handwriting [of the law] . . . having nailed it to the cross.'*⁵

Instead of rules and prohibitions, the early Christians followed Jesus' lead regarding the Sabbath. In the letter to the Hebrews, (probably Paul's work) the past is recalled — how Israel failed to keep God's laws so that He swore in anger, 'They shall not enter my rest.'⁶ Through the Gospel which Jesus taught, the Good News of the Kingdom of God *'for indeed the Gospel was preached to us . . .',*⁷ *'there will come a time of true rest, a true Sabbath for those who serve God: There remains a rest (Sabbath) for the people of God.'*⁸

This Sabbath is the future Kingdom of God, which Jesus will set up when He returns — when God will enjoy to the full the perfection of His creation, and when men and women who have truly served God, not in ritual and laws, but in service and love, will celebrate their God and Creator.

SABBATH OR SUNDAY?

So what does the Sabbath mean to a Christian? In fact the Sabbath (as still kept by many Jews, lasting from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset) no longer exists for Christians.

For Christians, Sunday has taken its place. In the early Christian era, the death and resurrection of Jesus was celebrated at any convenient time, when believers gathered together. Later it was usually kept on the first day of the week, our Sunday, which is particularly appropriate as the day on which Jesus was resurrected. It was probably the Emperor Constantine who, in the 4th Century AD, decreed Sunday as a holy day, on which Jesus would be remembered.

⁵Colossians 2.14 ⁶Hebrews 4.11 ⁷Hebrews 5.2

So, what are Christians to do today about THEIR Sabbath, THEIR day of rest? Do those bright lights shining on the busy acquisitiveness of the supermarkets mean that the Sabbath has lost its way? For some, perhaps. What is more important is our way of life, not just on Sundays, but EVERY day of the week, every waking hour — important that we do not allow rituals to displace God in our lives. Rather that, through Gods word, the Bible, we should understand God, learn about His purpose, obey His laws IN OUR HEARTS AND MINDS, and serve Him with faith, love and compassion, in the pattern of Jesus' life, that we might have a place in God's Kingdom.

For as it is written '*There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.*'⁸

P. H. Evans
Ipswich

⁸Hebrews 5.9

Philippians

HERE, AS A welcome change, is an epistle from Paul full of joy — one in which he expresses overwhelming delight in the Christian community living in Philippi, the chief city of Macedonia. No less than 14 times throughout this letter¹ the apostle either expresses his own joy at the faithfulness and steadfastness of the believers there, or is urging them all to rejoice with him because of their sure hope in the coming 'day of Christ' and the reward he will then bring. Note the emphasis of Paul's repeated '*all of you*' in the first eight verses; his satisfaction is total.

HOW THE PHILIPPIAN ECCLESIA BEGAN

Paul's love for the Philippian believers stemmed from his earliest visit there during his second missionary journey, as recounted by Luke in Acts chapter 16. A certain Lydia had obeyed the gospel message, together with her household, as had the prison gaoler with all his household. From these two (and possibly Luke himself²) had sprung up a thriving church, cared for by 'bishops' (ie 'overseers') and deacons (ministers and administrators).³ The apostle made further visits to Macedonia⁴ before his arrest in Jerusalem, which would have strengthened the bond of affection that had already been established. No wonder he writes most appreciatively of the Philippians' '*fellowship*' ('share') in furthering the gospel '*from the very first day onward*', and prays that their love for Christ might grow more and more.⁵

PAUL'S WORK WHILE IN PRISON

Meanwhile his imprisonment in Rome had, in fact, resulted in an unexpected bonus; the gospel of the kingdom was being heard throughout the Praetorian guard⁶ and was making converts.⁷ Not that this advance was without its problems, for some even there were opposing Paul's preaching. Never mind, says the apostle, whether in harmony or discord, Christ is still being preached and the gospel is making progress despite these unwanted disputes.⁸

¹The verb *chairó*, 'to rejoice' occurs nine times, the related noun five (translated 'gladness' in *Philippians* 2. 29 AV). NB in *Philippians* 1.26, 2.16 and 3.3 (AV) a different word is used, meaning 'glory' or 'boast'. ²The 'we' passages in the Acts cease after chapter 16.17 (cp verse 40), while Paul is still in Philippi, and re-appear when the apostle returns there (*Acts* 20.5-6), suggesting that Luke remained in this city. ³*Philippians* 1.1 ⁴*Acts* 20.1,3,6 ⁵*Philippians* 1.9 ⁶*Philippians* 1.13 RV; AV 'palace' ⁷cp *Philippians* 4.23 ⁸*Philippians* 1. 12-18. Clearly the gospel message itself had not been corrupted, otherwise Paul's calm acceptance of the position would have been totally out of character.

PAUL — HIS DILEMMA

Paul expresses his hope in an early release from prison, in answer to the believers' prayers to God on his behalf.⁹ This posed a dilemma. If he were condemned to death at his forthcoming trial (it did happen eventually — *II Timothy* 4.6) it would mean *in conscious terms* the immediate awakening of resurrection and of union with the returned Lord (because the interval, however long, between death and resurrection passes in a flash to the sleeping, ie unconscious, dead¹⁰). But the apostle's unselfish preference as for further service for Christ with the Philippians and others, overrides the '*far better*' alternative.¹¹ In either case he exhorts his readers to stand firm, supporting one another in face of the opposition with its accompanying suffering.¹² They were to let God work His salvation in them, without questioning His wisdom or grumbling at its outworking in their lives.¹³ Such humble submission to God's guidance would be a stark contrast with Israel's persistent fault-finding in their desert journey after the Exodus from Egypt, for they were indeed a '*blemished, crooked and perverse generation*' both then and in their subsequent history.¹⁴

THE MIND OF CHRIST

Paul's appreciation of Christ's love was unbounded and unqualified. Had not his Lord and Saviour rescued him from being an outright persecutor of the faith, to become its foremost advocate in the Gentile world? Thus he gloried in Christ and accounted knowing him as being of '*surpassing worth*'.¹⁵ Previously a proud Pharisee, the apostle now worshipped the one who, although the only-begotten Son of God, had humbled himself by submitting to his long-predicted role as the '*suffering servant*',¹⁶ and in fulfilment of that role had suffered an ignominious death on the cross.¹⁷ Because of this humble submission to his Father's will, God had highly exalted him and *favoured* him (see Young's concordance) with the Name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should (eventually) bow . . . and every tongue confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.¹⁸

Trinitarians have seized on this passage and claimed it proves Christ's equality with his Father and his pre-existence before being born of Mary. On what grounds have these claims been made? The statement that *God* had highly exalted Jesus and *favoured* him with His name hardly supports the idea of equality of status! Nor does the final clause that all this is being done '*to the glory of God the Father*'. As regards Christ's alleged pre-existence, it is argued that '*being in the form of God*' (verse 6) means '*being originally . . .*' (see RV margin). Often, however, this not uncommon verb (huparchó) just cannot be translated this way, so it must not be pressed

⁹*Philippians* 1.19,24-26; 2.24 Clearly the gospel message itself had not been corrupted, otherwise Paul's calm acceptance of the position would have been totally out of character.

¹⁰See further note on this in connection with *I Corinthians* 15 ¹¹*Philippians* 1. 21-26

¹²*Philippians* 1. 27-30 ¹³*Philippians* 2. 12-18 ¹⁴*cp Philippians* 2. 14 with *Deuteronomy* 32. 5 RV

¹⁵*Philippians* 3. 8 RSV ¹⁶*Isaiah* 52. 13 & 53. 12 ¹⁷*Philippians* 2. 6-8 ¹⁸*Philippians* 2. 5-11

pressed as valid here.¹⁹ *'Made in the likeness of men'* echoes Galatians 4.4: *'... made of a woman, made under the law'* (like all his brothers). Similarly *'made himself of no reputation'*, literally: *'emptied himself'*, signifies his complete submission to the human state in which he was born eg experiencing hunger and fatigue, meeting strong opposition from those who should have welcomed him, people who threatened violence and finally employed it against him. As Son of God he could have used Spirit power to escape all these experiences — but he did not.

What then does Paul mean by *'thought it not robbery to be equal with God'*? *'Robbery'* here is derived from a Greek verb meaning 'to snatch' — as in John 10.28,29 (RV and RSV): *'no-one shall snatch them [the sheep] out of my [or my Father's] hand'*. This idea of *'snatching'*, plus the phrase *'equal with God'*, takes us straight back to Adam in Eden. Adam was created in the *'form'* or *'image'* of God; it was in the divine purpose that, after a period of probation and obedience, he would be made *'equal to the angels'*.²⁰ However, the serpent had promised: *'Ye shall be as God [Elohim], knowing good and evil'*,²¹ and Adam *'snatched'* at this deviation from God's intention — so bringing sin and death into the world, both upon himself and upon all his descendants.²² In so doing he was caring only for his own selfish interests (see verse 4 here). By contrast the Lord Jesus refused to succumb to temptation; he put the cross before the crown and did not *'snatch'* at the reward. In his concern for the salvation of all who should believe on his name he submitted to the crucifixion and thus bore away their sins, bringing life and immortality to light through the gospel.²³ This *'love of Christ'* manifested by the Saviour should therefore be the aim of all his servants. This is Paul's exhortation in a nutshell, and the contrast with events of the fall in Eden makes his meaning transparently clear. So does his mention in this context of two faithful fellow-workers, Timothy and Epaphroditus. Of Timothy he writes: *'I have no-one like him, who will be genuinely anxious for your welfare. They all look after their own interests ...'*²⁴ Epaphroditus too was devoted to the Philippian believers and had put his life in danger by the service he had rendered them.²⁵ The AV here gives the false impression that these Philippians had neglected Paul's needs (verse 30: *'to supply your lack of service towards me'*); the RSV is clearer: *'to complete your service to me'* for Paul plainly states later that they had been concerned for his welfare but had lacked opportunity.²⁶

DOGS AND EVIL WORKERS

*'Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers'*²⁷ comes as a surprise in a letter like this, but the context again makes clear that the apostle is warning this church too against *'the circumcision party'*, who *'mutilate the flesh'* (RSV), ie the Judaizing

¹⁹eg Romans 4. 19: *'[Abraham] being one hundred years old'*; I Corinthians 11.18: *'I hear that there be divisions among you'*. See also Acts 19.36; 27.34; Luke 8.41; II Peter 3.11; James 2.15 etc. Inserting *'originally'* into such passages confounds their sense. ²⁰Luke 20. 36

²¹Genesis 3. 5 RV ²²Romans 5. 12 ²³II Timothy 1. 10 ²⁴Philippians 2. 20-21 RSV

²⁵Philippians 2. 25-30 ²⁶Philippians 4. 10 ²⁷Philippians 3. 2

faction undermining the basic principle of Paul's teaching: '*salvation through the righteousness of faith in Christ*'.²⁸ True circumcision, says Paul, is '*of the heart*', and means divesting oneself of evil motives and desires.²⁹ So far as the Jewish world is concerned, Paul had fleshly qualifications superior to his critics — he was a 'full-blooded' Hebrew³⁰ — but these amounted to nothing compared with his status as Christ's servant, committed to sharing his sufferings, so that '*by any means I might attain unto the resurrection from the dead*'.³¹ As he knew and taught that '*we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*'. . .³² the attainment he sought was not just being raised from the dead but rather to be granted the resurrection state, ie spirit nature and perfection, no longer subject to pain, disease and death.³³ All this is in harmony with the firm hope he expresses in chapter 3 verses 20, 21, that he and all true believers await the Lord's return from heaven to '*change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself*' (RSV). Note the better translation of chapter 3 verse 20 in the RV: '*Our citizenship is in heaven, from whence also we wait for a Saviour*. . .', a contrast to the citizenship enjoyed by people in Philippi, a Roman colony. Again the expectation is not that the approved go to be with Christ in heaven but that he returns to earth to live with them there.

CONCLUDING EXHORTATIONS

After urging two sisters in Christ to reconcile their differences Paul again exhorts his readers to '*rejoice in the Lord alway*' who was then (and still is!) '*at hand*', ie coming '*as a thief*'³⁴ at any stage in the believer's life. Until that most desirable event takes place, peace of mind will come by reliance on prayer with thanksgiving.³⁵ Then follows some sound psychology — to '*think*' (meditate) on things which are true, honourable, just, pure, lovely, of good report, excellent and praiseworthy — all of which are to be found in God's Word. '*As [a man] thinks in his heart, so is he*',³⁶ and this sort of mental discipline cannot be too highly commended for directing any Christian's heart into godly hopes and activity. Paul adds his grateful thanks to the Philippians for all the care they had shown him; more than once they had sent (financial?) help when he was in need. In saying this he was not '*angling*' for more, for he had learned to be content in all circumstances, whether hungry or well fed, in plenty or want — '*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*' — but their gifts were like a fragrant sacrifice, pleasing to God, Who would meet all *their* needs too. And with Christian greetings from the Roman believers to those in Philippi the letter ends.

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²⁸Philippians 3. 9 ²⁹Romans 2. 29 — fully supported by Old Testament teaching eg Leviticus 26.41; Deuteronomy 10.16; 30.6; Jeremiah 4.4; 9.26 ³⁰Philippians 3. 5,6 ³¹Philippians 3. 11 ³²II Corinthians 5. 10 ³³Luke 20. 34-36 ³⁴I Thessalonians 5. 2 ³⁵Philippians 4. 4-7
³⁶Proverbs 23. 7